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SUBJECT Full Text

ROBERT MACNEIL: It's an odd little phony war period we're going through before President Carter and Mr. Brezhnev go to Vienna to sign the SALT treaty next month. U.S. officials are busily selling and U.S. critics are busy attacking a treaty we haven't seen yet. Even odder is the spectacle of some Soviet officials joining with the Administration in warning about the consequences of rejecting that treaty.

While this rehearsal for the real SALT debate is underway, Mr. Carter and Mr. Brezhnev are preparing for their summit meeting on June 15th, the first time they will have met each other.

Two of the men who will be advising the American and Soviet leaders on what to expect from each other are with us tonight: Marshall Shulman of the United States and Georgi Arbatov of the Soviet Union.

JIM LEHRER: Robin, there are undoubtedly scores of people in the Soviet Union who make it their business to keep tabs on what's happening in the United States. But there is probably no Russian who makes it more his business than Georgi Arbatov, known everywhere as the Soviets' number one America watcher. He's the Director of the Soviets' Institute for the Study of the United States and Canada, a group of some 300 analysts who devote full time to watching us, our defense, our economy, our religion, even our television programs.

Under Mr. Arbatov, the Institute publishes a regular slick magazine on America called U.S.A. He's also a Deputy to the Supreme Soviet, accompanies most high-level Soviet officials to meetings with their American counterparts, is among those

who advises one and all, from the Soviet leadership on down, on most matters concerning the United States, including SALT II.

Doctor, President Carter and others have made a point that SALT II is not based on trust, that the United States fully expects you Soviets to cheat. Is that a correct expectation?

GEORGI ARBATOV: Well, I think that the expressions you used were just answers to the attacks which have begun very early against this treaty. I would say that we have just as many, or as few, reasons to expect you cheat on the treaty as you have for us. I think here we are in a symmetrical situation. But the treaties in general are made in such way that there are enough instruments to verify them, especially treaties which regulate such spheres as arms race and armaments, etcetera.

LEHRER: One of the, of course, instruments that's not in the treaty is on-site inspection. Why are the Soviets opposed to that? Why are you opposed to on-site inspection?

ARBATOV: Well, you know, up till now there was talk only about on-site inspection which was not accompanied by a serious negotiations on such arms control measures which will require, really, this inspection. So we had all the reasons to believe that the other side wanted to impose upon us this on-site inspection just to -- excuse me this word -- spy on us.

I am sure that would the arms control measures which we negotiate with you go far enough, we would agree with all measures to control it. And we have some -- in some other negotiations, we have some progress on this.

I would also add that I think this has become some sort of a favorite game with American public: that the Russians are against on-site inspection, the Americans are for.

LEHRER: That's not true?

ARBATOV: I am sure that would there be an agreement on on-site inspection, there would be a lot of objections from American side. If you deny us, for instance, access to technology of oil drilling machinery, I am sure your people -- militarists especially, but not only they -- would deny us access to some more sensitive things.

And then, you know, in our time, on-site inspection doesn't become a panacea. Because some things, even with on-site inspections, they would be not enough.

But at the same time, I would say that the main thing is that the things which really matter and which go into the

treaty, this treaty and other treaties that we have signed, all of them are verifiable by national means, by other instruments which are...

LEHRER: But by spying, right? Spy means.

ARBATOV: Well, you know, it's something different. If you have verification measures, you know, then you can also compare with spying the work of each expert, in whatever country it is, and each instrument. Because we understand [unintelligible] something illegitimate which was not agreed upon it.

Here, we have agreed upon all means to verify what we have negotiated with the United States.

LEHRER: From the Soviet point of view, are the means of verification adequate in the treaty?

ARBATOV: Well, we have some concerns with some of weapon systems that you have. But all in all, we consider them to be satisfactory as your side does. I have in mind the Administration.

And you know, also, it's absolutely clear, I think, for everybody that, with modern technical means, you really can not hide anything significant. And to cheat on something very insignificant, I think no country would take such a risk; just for nothing, to put at stake the whole reputation, the whole treaty, the whole political image.

And anyway, everything which was negotiated, in very painstaking negotiations, as I understand, can be verified.

LEHRER: Why do you think it is -- you make it your living, as I said, to study the United States. Why do you believe that so many Americans -- you could even include the President, on down -- particularly the critics of the treaty, say, in effect, they do not trust the Russians to do what they say they will do in this treaty?

ARBATOV: I think that -- well, different people, of course, have different reasons to say so. And I doubt that all Americans think that they under not circumstances can trust the Russians.

I would say we have a very heavy burden of our past, burden of Cold War, and many remnants of it are there still. Some people made their living -- like I am making my living of studying the United States, make their living on generating suspicions. And it was all the time, you know. We have a real long and sad history in this. In the United States, such campaigns were generated against Soviet Union. Just in this field,

as well, the story about bomber gap, for instance, in '59, when a few years after it was officially said that there was no bomber gap, actually; but the bombers were already built on the United States side. The same happened with missile gap and with others.

I'm sure there are very serious economic -- and not only economic -- vested interests here who really thrive on these suspicions and do everything they can to undermine the trust and confidence which are really needed for development of normal relations.

LEHRER: Doctor, thank you.

MACNEIL: One of Dr. Arbatov's chief counterparts on the American side is Marshall Shulman, Special Adviser on Soviet Affairs to Secretary of State Cyrus Vance. Dr. Shulman is one of this country's leading academic experts on the Soviet affairs, the author of a number of books on U.S.-Soviet relations, and former Director of the Russian Institute at Columbia University. He's been closely involved with the SALT negotiations.

Dr. Shulman, is verification just an issue for us, not for the Soviet Union?

MARSHALL SHULMAN: Well, Mr. MacNeil, I think it's a problem on both sides. I listened with interest when Dr. Arbatov said that we have a heavy legacy from the past. It's the fact that we've had three decades of rather sharply hostile relations, and it would be surprising if two nations with that experience suddenly moved into a situation of trust with each other, especially dealing with vital matters of our own security. So it is clear that the SALT agreement is not and cannot be based upon trust.

MACNEIL: The President and others have said, "Well, we're an open society, and the Soviets don't really have to worry about that. It is we who have to worry because theirs is a more closed society."

Do they look at it that way?

ARBATOV: Well, I wouldn't say that we look at this in that way, you know. And I would say that you have not an impeccable record in this field. I would remind -- well, you know, if it goes in general, you have hidden the Manhattan Project, for good reasons, maybe. For many years, you didn't say that there was this U-2, for instance, plane in 1960. And we have also many other things which we remember.

So, you know, this story about "We are good guys" -- I think, and maybe many Russians think the same way, "We are

good guys. We don't want to harm anybody. They are doing it." And really, we are pretty much sure -- and this is according to the facts -- that the whole arms race was imposed upon us beginning in '45.

Excuse me.

MACNEIL: Let's hear your answer, Dr. Shulman.

SHULMAN: Well, it is certainly true that there are differences in the two societies, asymmetries, in that you can read an awful lot about what we do in the military field in many of the technical publications or the newspapers.

ARBATOV: Even some misleading things.

SHULMAN: Yes, sometimes the untruth, too.

It is also true, however, that in vital matters we have managed to conduct our affairs with appropriate security when necessary.

But it is, nevertheless, the case that both societies have profound suspicions. They have different aims and different objectives. And what we need to do is to work our way through this period, with a verifiable agreement, to a later period when perhaps there can be greater confidence in each other than there exists now.

MACNEIL: You study the Soviet Union all the time. Do you detect a debate there over the merits of this treaty, either before its negotiation or now?

SHULMAN: It is my impression, Mr. MacNeil, that there was quite an exchange of opinion from the very beginning, when the idea of SALT was proposed, about whether this was feasible and whether it could be effectively done. It appears to me that in the recent years, certainly over the last decade or so, that the present leadership has committed itself very seriously to the idea of trying to reach a SALT agreement.

MACNEIL: Why is this agreement, in your view, in the American view, so important to the Soviet leadership?

SHULMAN: Well, the first reason, I think, is that they, like we, have looked into the chasm of what modern nuclear and missile weapons mean. They mean that mankind, for the first time, really has the capacity for obliterating life on the planet. That is the big, awesome fact that we start with.

Secondly, there is, for the Soviet Union, the problem of an enormous diversion of resources into the military field,

when there is an urgent need for the devotion of those resources to the development of a modern state and modern technology.

MACNEIL: Finally, do you find it strange, Dr. Shulman, to find yourself in closer agreement with a Soviet official on the implications of this treaty than with many Americans who are attacking it?

SHULMAN: Well, it's an interesting question. But, you know, there is a fundamental anomaly in the situation. And what I hope is that in the course of this discussion, that we will not only succeed in getting support for ratification of SALT, but what we will do is to get wider public understanding than we have had in the past that whatever may be the differences between the Soviet Union and the United States, whatever the differences in our societies, whatever the difference in our aims, whether we approve of the things that the Soviet Union does or do not, there is one point on which their security and our security are tied up together. And it does not mean that because you support SALT that you necessarily take a benign or a naive or a favorable view of the Soviet Union.

That point has got to get across.

MACNEIL: Thank you.

LEHRER: Gentlemen, those opposed to the treaty, those who are attacking the treaty, one of the points they make is that the Soviet Union does not understand, nor does it accept, the basic idea of equality; that the Soviet Union, through the SALT II treaty, is trying to negotiate a position of superiority.

Is that true?

ARBATOV: This is -- this is not true. And I am sure the Americans wouldn't agree to it. The treaty is not yet published, but the major points of it are well known. And we have really -- in the major things, we have complete numerical equality.

There are some asymmetries. You can have more bombers, we can have more of something else. But this is just because of different geopolitical situations, different traditions, different technology, etcetera. But if you weigh it up, we are in a situation of relative parity, which for many time -- for a long time, already, means that both of us can destroy each other several times, and maybe the whole planet with us.

And the treaty is, I think, very pedantically made just in this way, to be very fair and very equality.

And you know -- what do you mean by saying that we don't understand equality? I think this is the point on which we

pressed all the time. I think it is more difficult for those Americans who criticize the treaty to understand and to begin to live with idea of equality. Because I understand, this is really a difficult psychological adaptation. You lived all the time with the idea of superiority. And now...

LEHRER: So you're saying the Soviet Union no longer wants superiority.

ARBATOV: Well, it's officially said. It is a doctrine that we don't try for superiorty. And we know that it is impossible and it is meaningless. Whatever we'll do, you'll do at the same time, and so we'll get to the same even level, but on a higher and higher...

LEHRER: Do you agree? Is that your reading of Soviet intentions now, Dr. Shulman?

SHULMAN: Well, what Dr. Arbatov said at this last is certainly true: that given the nature of the weapons -- you have to bring some common sense to bear on this -- it is clearly the case that neither they nor we could hope, even if we doubled our present arsenals, to have a significant military advantage over the other, that neither country could hope to have the kind of military capability that could flatten the other side and escape unscathed.

So that if there are in the asymmetries some imbalances, with Soviet advantages on one weapon system, American advantages on another weapon system, that does not mean that either they or we would have the capability of plastering the other side.

LEHRER: Well, you're familiar, I'm sure, with the remarks by Paul Nitze, the former Defense Department official, who is severely critical of the SALT treaty. He says, "The Russians do not understand what we mean by fairness."

You've talked to the Russians. You've made your living talking to the Russians. Is there a problem there?

SHULMAN: Well, first of all, Paul Nitze is an old friend of mine. But on this point, it seems to me not relevant. The question is not one of fairness, it's one of survival and of whether their security and our security are better advanced by the treaty.

It is the case here that if we are able to stabilize the strategic military competition at a moderate level, instead of letting it run into an unregulated competition, that this makes sense both for them and for us. It isn't a question of fairness. It's a question of our security and their security.

ARBATOV: And common sense on both sides.

LEHRER: Doctor, let me ask you this. There will probably be attempts, at least, in the United States Senate to amend this treaty. Will the Soviets consider and accept an amended treaty, or must it be accepted the way it's written?

ARBATOV: Well, you know, the treaty was negotiated by us with representatives of three successive American Administrations, Republican and Democratic, for so many years and in very -- in good praise in in very painstaking way. And we made all the compromises we considered to be possible and admissible.

And I -- I would ask whether the Americans would make some additional concessions, under the pressure of Supreme Soviet, for instance, which is a counterpart of your Congress. I am sure not so. You have not to accept from us another reaction.

And I would say that some of the concerns which are expressed -- because there are very different people who criticize the treaty -- they really -- they really have some foundation: that it's not enough cuts, the arms control measures are not yet -- not -- go not far enough, etcetera. And even some others. They are simply an agenda for SALT II. Because what's important with this SALT II treaty is that it means, really, a process. It is a point, you know, of a process. If we have it, we can immediately proceed with other agreement.

LEHRER: I interpret your answer -- you tell me if I've interpreted your answer correctly...

ARBATOV: Yes.

LEHRER: That if the treaty is amended, it might not -- it might not be accepted by the Soviet leadership.

ARBATOV: Oh, yes. Yes.

LEHRER: That's what you're saying.

ARBATOV: And that would be a very sad story. Because you spoke about -- we touched upon this, how we look upon you. And, you know, we had our really serious disappointments. We had nego -- negotiated a trade treaty in 1972. Then the Congress made some amendments which made it impossible for us.

If it -- would it happen in the same way, I am sure the only conclusion to which the Russians will come [is] that you simply cannot do serious business with Americans.

LEHRER: Thank you.

MACNEIL: Dr. Arbatov, does Mr. Brezhnev, the Soviet leader, regard this SALT treaty, as some people have suggested here, as the crowning achievement of his time of leadership?

ARBATOV: Well, I am sure that he is very serious about it. He's very devoted to the ideas of peace and arms control.

I wouldn't so say easily that this crowning experience, because I think the Helsinki declaration -- act, final act of this European Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe in '75 was a great achievement. I think in '72, the first breakthrough with the Cold War, you know, and the summit meetings were also -- I think he has a very good record in this field. And, of course, this is also a great -- would be a very great achievement.

MACNEIL: Well, let me ask this, Dr. Arbatov. Is it important that this treaty be concluded and ratified before Mr. Brezhnev's period of leadership ends?

ARBATOV: Well, you know, this is -- really, I hope that Mr. Brezhnev will be at the leadership of the party many years. And you have in mind -- if you have in mind that this will last for several years, the process of ratification, I wouldn't be very easy with it.

But, you know, we -- you have to deal -- we have to deal as a nation with nation here. It's, of course, personalities play a great role. But here it is a state-to-state affair and we have to do it. And I think we have to not to lose time, because of many reasons.

MACNEIL: Does our side, the American side, Dr. Shulman, feel it's important to get this wrapped up while Mr. Brezhnev is still there?

SHULMAN: Well, we fell that it's desirable to get the SALT treaty in place, because it's in our interest to do so, not primarily tied to Mr. Brezhnev, but because we regard the treaty as a good one and necessary. And our feeling is that, to respond to the implied suggestion in your question, is that there, in all likelihood, is enough continuity in the Russian situation that, undoubtedly, the commitments that are entered into now would be sustained by the government later.

ARBATOV: May I add?

MACNEIL: Yes.

ARBATOV: I think we have some reasons -- just for symmetry. I think we have some good reasons to be rather uneasy about your political year. So -- I mean next year with presidential election, which, as we learned the hard way, is not the best time to negotiate and ratify serious treaties, when you are so overwhelmed by very important, of course, events which you have at home.

So this -- there are many reasons, you know, for -- which make us...

MACNEIL: Well, may I -- may I interpret -- may I interpret that to mean that, on your side, you think it's important to get this ratified while Mr. Carter is still President?

ARBATOV: Well...

[Laughter]

MACNEIL: All right.

Dr. Arbatov, if the Soviet Union wants equality in strategic weapons, as you've just described, why has it been, as we are told repeatedly here, building up its conventional forces in Europe, its numbers of tanks, and its navy, to a point where many American observers feel that you either have achieved or are aiming at superiority in those forces?

ARBATOV: Well, you know, it's a question like why are you -- do you beat your wife on Thursdays? Because, actually, we -- given to a man who maybe has no wife at all, or something like this.

I don't want to say that we have no forces in Europe. But we have -- we have given the numbers at the conference in Vienna. Actually, even according to your numbers, if we take all the NATO forces and all Warsaw forces, there is rough equality in numbers. And there were very solemn assurances made, beginning with Brezhnev and some of other leaders of ours, that for the last year, for several last years we haven't increased our troops by a single soldier.

At the same time, you must understand there are some comparisons made on the ground forces of United States and Soviet Union, but we are really in different geopolitical positions. And I think that would the United States have, let's say, instead of Canada, Warsaw Pact treaty troops and Warsaw Pact countries on its northern border, and, instead of Mexico, China on its southern border, it would also require from the United States some measures and some policy to insure its defense. Because we know what it means, you know, not to insure our defense. We

have some memories about World War II, and we don't want it to repeat itself.

But at the same time, we are ready, as in strategic field, and there are negotiations, which are not in very quick progress, I am sorry to say, but I hope that they will be in progress. And we are ready, on an equal basis, to reduce the forces we have in Europe on both sides.

MACNEIL: Well, I'm afraid that's the end of our time this evening.